

Graybar Electric Company Building

55 West Canfield

Current Name: Board of Education Department of Audio-Visual Service Building

Local

State

State Marker

National ✓ 9/22/97



55 W. Canfield, built 1926.



Historic overview:

The Graybar Electric Company was the nation's largest independent electrical and telecommunications distributor from 1926 into the 1940s. The warehouse building on Canfield was rented to the company during this time. Graybar's goal was to bring new communications equipment into public use. The business began to gain status as a large company following the invention of the telephone and lamp in the 1870s. These inventions broadened the applications of electricity and electrical manufacturing. The industry grew with the invention of the airplane and automobile at the turn of the century, and Graybar developed a chain of warehouses across the nation.

Incorporated as the Western Electric Manufacturing Company in 1872, Graybar made business history as the first major corporation when it reverted to its original designation as the basis for its corporate name in 1926. Three years later, in 1929, another and even greater business first was achieved. Graybar employees purchased the company. It was the first time ever that a company of such size became the property of its employees. Nearly all 2,300 employees bought stock. Graybar continued to grow during the 30s, with the merchandising of new products, and in the war years of the 40s through supplying war-needed goods. Today annual sales have climbed to an all-time high. The number of distribution centers now totals 200, and the number of employees is close to 5,000. The building today serves as the Audio-Visual Department of the Detroit Board of Education.

